

Coming Stories by
Edward Worthy
Edward Lawson
Dorothy West

THE OMAHA GUIDE

ESTABLISHED 1878 ALL THE NEWS WHILE IT IS NEWS NEW TO THE LIFE

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BLUE RIBBON FICTION IS FOUND EVERY WEEK IN
THE FEATURE SECTION

NAT TURNER The First John Brown

He Heard a Voice from Heaven Say, "Strike a Blow for Freedom"



Left—Two methods of punishing slaves whose bodies were made naked in order that the pain of the lash and the paddle would be as severe as possible. Note the stickthrough the slave's knees and how the female slave is tied to the ground. On the right, Nat Turner and his crowd begin the massacre of slave-holders in Southhampton County, Virginia, and the burning of the plantations.

Drawing by Fred Watson from Illustrations in Dr. Carter Woodson's book the "Negro in Our History."

Nat Turner, a slave born October 2, 1800, in Southampton, Virginia, struck a blow at the vicious system of slavery in the United States, that upset the whole smug and complacent attitude of the American in the period prior to the Civil War.

He inspired in the hearts of all slaveholders the fear born of cowardice, and made his name anathema to the heads of households from one end of the country to the other, North and South.

One black man sent a whole nation floundering into an orgy of foolish laws, built on fear of the colored man; laws that aimed to blot out all blacks, bond and free.

Nat Turner was of unmixed Negro blood. His father, a native of Africa, escaped from slavery and emigrated to Liberia, where his grave is looked upon as a national shrine.

With a mind naturally restless and active, he learned to read and write easily. By intuition and study, when not working for his master, he manufactured paper, gunpowder, pottery, and some common articles.

Heard Voices

His utter belief in the idea that he was born to do a great deed, to unlock a hidden spring, whose water would well up and flow over the country, gave him the zest and almost incredible faith that quickened his understanding and perception by self-study.

To follow his thought in his own words, he said:

"I saw white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle, and the sun darkened—the thunder rolled in the heavens, and blood flowed in streams and I heard a voice saying, 'Such is your luck, such you are called to see, and let it come rough or smooth you must surely bear it.'"

Like Joan of Arc, Turner spent hours in fasting and praying. This in 1825.

On August 21, 1831, this slave, hardly beyond the years of young manhood, met six men, who had pledged their co-operation and support in the woods of Southampton

County. These men were Hark Travis, Henry Porter, Samuel Francis, Nelson Williams, Will Francis, and Jack Reese. They worked out plans while they ate, remaining long after midnight.

The massacre was begun at the house of Joseph Travis, the man to whom Nat Turner then belonged. Armed with a hatchet, Turner entered his master's chamber, the door having been broken open with an axe, and aimed the first blow of death. The hatchet glanced harmlessly from the head of the would-be victim and the first fatal blow was given by Will Francis, the one of the party who had got into the plot without Turner's suggestion. All of his master's household, five in number, soon perished.

Old Muskets

The insurgents procured four guns, several old muskets, with a few rounds of ammunition.

At the barn, under the command of Turner, the party was drilled and maneuvered. Turner himself assumed the title of General Cargill with a stipend of ten dollars a day. Henry Porter, the paymaster, was to receive five dollars a day, and each private one dollar.

Thence they marched from plantation to plantation until by Monday morning the party numbered fifteen with nine mounted. Before nine o'clock the force had increased to forty and the insurgents had covered an extent of territory two or three miles distant from the first point of attack, sweeping everything before them.

Used Horses

Turner generally took his station in the rear, with fifteen or twenty of the best armed and reliable men at the front, who usually approached the houses as fast as their horses could run for the double purpose of preventing escapes and of striking terror. His force continued to increase until they numbered sixty, all armed with guns, axes, swords, and clubs, and mounted.

This line of attack was kept up until late Monday afternoon, when

they were about three miles distant from Jerusalem, the county seat, where Turner reluctantly halted while some of his men went in search of re-enforcements. He was eager to push on to the county seat and capture it as soon as possible, and this delay proved the turning point in the enterprise.

Battle with 18

Impatient at the delay of his men who had turned aside, Turner started to the mansion house where they had gone and on their return to the wood found a party of white men who had pursued the bloody path of the insurrectionists and disposed of the guard of eight men whom Turner had left at the roadside.

There were eighteen white men under the command of Captain Alexander P. Peete. They had been directed to reserve their fire until within thirty paces, but one of them fired on the insurgents when within about one hundred yards.

Half of the whites retreated when Turner ordered his men to fire and rush on them. The few remaining white men stood their ground until Turner approached within fifty yards, when they too fired and retreated with several wounded.

Turner pursued and overtook some of them and their complete slaughter was only prevented by the timely arrival of a party of whites approaching in another direction from Jerusalem.

Turner then determined to cross the Nottoway River and attack Jerusalem where he hoped to obtain additional ammunition and arms, which plan was unsuccessful. His forces were then attacked and a retreat followed. After this Turner never saw many of his men any more.

Turner concealed himself in the woods, but was not discouraged, for, by messenger, he directed his forces to rally at the point where on the previous Sunday, they had started their bloody work, but the discovery of white men riding around the place, convinced him that he had been betrayed.

The leader then gave up hope of an immediate attack, and on Thursday, after supplying himself with provisions from the old plantation, he scratched a hole under a

pile of fence rails in a field and concealed himself for nearly six weeks, never leaving his hiding place except for a few minutes in the quiet of night to obtain water.

Reign of Terror

A reign of terror followed in Virginia. Labor was paralyzed, plantations abandoned, women and children were driven from home and many refugees spent night after night in the woods. Retaliation began.

In a little more than one day 120 slaves were killed. One white slaveholder boasted that he himself had killed between ten and fifteen Negroes. Newspapers contained from day to day protests against the cruelties performed. White volunteers rode in all directions visiting plantations, torturing Negroes and committing nameless atrocities. Slaves who were distrusted were pointed out and shot down if they endeavored to escape.

Englishman Mobbed

But these outrages were not limited to the population. An Englishman, named Robinson, who was a book-seller in Petersburg, stood guard with others at the bridge when word was given out that five hundred Negroes were marching against the town. After the panic had subsided, he made the remark that the blacks were entitled to their freedom and ought to be emancipated. This led to great excitement and the man was warned to leave town. He took passage in a stage coach, but the vehicle was stopped. He then took refuge in a friend's house, but it was broken open and he was delivered to the mob. The civil authorities, when informed of the affair, refused to interfere. The mob stripped him, gave him a considerable number of lashes and sent him on foot, naked under a hot sun to Richmond, whence he, with difficulty, found passage to New York.

Turner Had No Losses

Sixty-one white persons were killed, but not a slave was slain in any of the encounters led by Turner.

Fifty-three slaves were arrested, 17 of them were convicted and executed, 12 convicted and transported, 10 acquitted, seven discharged and four sent on to the Superior Court. Four of those convicted and transported were boys. Only four free Negroes were brought to trial, one of whom was discharged and the other three finally executed. It is said that they were given decent burials.

Wild Rumors

In North Carolina there came a rumor that Negro insurgents had burnt Wilmington, massacred its inhabitants, and that 2,000 were marching on Raleigh. This was not true, but a plot had been worked out which was revealed by a free Negro. This caused Raleigh and Fayetteville to be put under military defense. Many arrests were made, several whipped and released and three of the leaders executed.

One of these, a very intelligent black preacher named David, was convicted on the testimony of another slave.

In South Carolina, Governor Hayne issued a proclamation to quiet rumors of similar uprisings.

In Macon, Ga., the entire population was aroused at midnight by rumors of an onslaught. Slaves were arrested and tied to trees while white captains of the militia hacked at them with swords.

In Alabama there were rumors of a joint conspiracy of Negroes and Indians.

At New Orleans the excitement was at such a height that a report that 1,200 stands of arms were found in a black man's house, was readily believed.

Dog Led to Arrest

But the public was not satisfied with this public revenge. Nat Turner was still at large. He had eluded his would-be captors ever since the day of the raid in August. That he was finally captured was more the result of accident than of design. A dog belonging to some of Nat Turner's acquaintances scented some meat in the cave where Turner was hiding, and stole it while he was absent. Shortly after, two colored men, one the owner of the dog, were hunting with the same dog. The dog barked at Turner.

Continued on Page Four